

SIEMENS' BLIND CRAFTSMEN

Frederic Sondern, Jr.

S HV 1971



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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

# BOUT OLD

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by Dr. O. A. Battista



plies especially to its cause which has been variously ascribed to drafts, exposure, fatigue, bacteria, viruses and innumerable other factors.

## FADS IN COLD CURES

Man has sought cold cures for centuries and imagination ran rampant through old-fashioned cold prescriptions. In 1676, for example, a British medical scholar writing in *Physick and Astrology* suggested brown sugar candy and garlic syrup as a cold remedy.

Brown sugar candy persisted. In 1790 it was part of a recipe that also included linseed, stick licorice, "sun" raisins and white vinegar or lemon juice. By 1808, a Philadelphia surgeon suggested more ascetic measures to route a cold: "I can venture confidently to recommend frequent draughts of cold fluid, combined with nauseating doses of emetics."

As little as 50 years ago, the august *Encyclopaedia Britannica* advised victims to "take a good purge and to encourage free perspiration by a hot bath, some diaphoretic sweat-producing drugs, as spirits of nitrous ether, being taken before retiring to bed."

We needn't laugh at the foibles of our ancestors. A popular regimen for the care and treatment of today's cold includes a hot bath, hot-tea-and-whiskey (to start perspiration) and a night's sleep under 12 blankets. Many people also take a strong laxative in the battle of man against cold. Chances are, patients so treated today are no worse off than their grandfathers and hardly more uncomfortable

than patients who were given brown sugar candy and garlic.

Fads, sure cures, preventive rituals and curative rites flourish in this least tractable and most prevalent of ills. The lore of modern magic includes cold baths to harden the body, exercises, sun lamps, hot fruit juice in the morning, hot milk at night, alcohol, laxatives, yoga, faith healing, spinal adjustments, diet, yeast-eating, psychoanalysis and even red underwear to ward off the demon. Probably any of these, if they increase our resistance to illness, may be of value.

## HOW TO LIVE WITH IT

Probably the best preventives of the common cold are sufficient rest, and an adequate, balanced diet supplemented by a good vitamin preparation and a feeling of satisfaction with life. If a cold actually impends, one of the antihistamine-plus compounds may stave it off. Most of these contain, along with the antihistamine, aspirin and vitamin C.

But assuming a cold has taken hold—what's to be done about it? Doctors agree that rest, preferably in bed is most important. Aspirin is generally recommended to lessen cold discomfort, although its actual therapeutic value in colds is uncertain. Drinking plenty of water or fruit juice is generally advised to make up for water losses caused by a cold. Keeping nasal passages clear eases breathing, improves rest and lessens the chances of a complicating ear or throat infection. Medication to cut down coughing helps the sufferer bear a cold with

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## Blinde bei der Arbeit



*Amberg*

Illustrated by James Lentine



A FEW MONTHS ago a crisis arose in one of the plants of the big Siemens electrical works in West Berlin. An important American customer placed a large order for switching equipment but the plant's production engineers said the deadline for shipment couldn't be met. Director Besold of the Siemens Switch Works thought otherwise. "Get our best men and ask them if they can assemble the parts faster than they ever did before," he ordered. A crack team was selected. It enthusiastically accepted the challenge and finished the job on time. It was an amazing performance—the more so because many of these picked craftsmen are blind.

The remarkable sightless workers of Siemens are only a small fraction of the firm's 160,000 employees. They are of course limited to the lighter manufacturing processes. Their astonishing success in operating complex machines and instruments formerly considered beyond their capabilities is influencing other industries in West Germany and other European countries to follow Siemens' example. Thanks to them a new world





# Siemens' Blind Craftsmen

A German manufacturer shows the world  
what sightless workers can do

by Frederic Sondern, Jr.

of interesting, lucrative employment is opening up for the blind.

On the walls of the shops of the Switch Works, as in most of the 27 other factories of Siemens & Halske and Siemens-Schuckert, West Germany's largest manufacturing combine, there are occasional signs: *Blind at Work*. "Try to pick them out, from behind," challenged my guide. "We scatter them among sighted workers. That makes them feel that they're equal to the others—which they are."

It wasn't easy to pick them out. Watching a row of men at drill presses who were boring and threading holes in small, cylindrical steel magnet cores—an operation requiring utmost precision—I noticed one who worked with extraordinary rhythmic speed and deftness. He was humming or occasionally laughing with his neighbor as his quick fingers moved piece after piece through the process. He couldn't be blind, I thought. But he was. "And an unusually skillful operator," said my guide. "He learns a whole new procedure, with

strange tools, in a couple of hours."

In another department, workers seated at a line of desk-like tables were assembling an intricate electrical mechanism which requires the use of three machines and the fitting of a dozen bolts, washers, nuts, and rivets of different sizes to each piece. Again the movements of one of the men particularly drew my attention. From the trays arranged in a circle in front of him he took the parts, drilled, finished, and fastened to other components which he lifted out of drawer bins with effortless precision. There was not a wasted motion; he never missed. Suddenly he turned in my direction, holding up a completed assembly. "Neat, isn't it?" His easy chuckle crinkled the laugh wrinkles around dead eyes behind black glasses. "They didn't think we could do it. But we showed them."

In the testing section where parts are checked for specified sizes and qualities I found an elderly blind workman who seemed grumpy. In front of him was a pile of what looked like nail files—spring steel switch



arms. With machine-like rapidity he would take one, bend it back and forth, hold it to his ear as he drew a fine rasp across its tip and throw it into one of two trays marked "Good" and "Reject." He was checking the flexibility of the arm, which must vibrate rapidly for thousands of hours without breaking, and the hardness of its tip. "Only the blind can do it that way, by feel and sound," my guide explained. "And they're always right, we find. The sighted take longer and sometimes get bored and careless. Not *that* one; he stays fussy."

"Look at these," the grizzled craftsman grumbled loudly, sloshing the few rejects around in their tray. "A disgrace! They should give us these things to make." One of the other mechanics was laughing. "Old Karl is an agreeable guy but he's a perfectionist, like all of them."

A special group of engineers at the Siemens headquarters in Munich designs aids to enable the blind to work at an increasing variety of machines. Most of these aids are simple and inexpensive—uncomplicated guides added to presses, milling machines, lathes and other powertools. A pair of small cleats may be nailed into the floor in front of a drill press to give the blind operator exact orientation, telling him how far his hands are from every lever and control. The scales on micrometers, gauges and other instruments are embossed with Braille symbols. No guide bar, rule, or jig takes longer than a few minutes for a sighted mechanic to install and set. Every machine and tool so modified can be used just as well by a seeing person at change of shift.

The most expensive gadget for the blind—cost \$75—is a supplement added to a supersensitive micrometer measuring with an accuracy of 1/10,000 of an inch. The sighted read a scale. The blind hear it. For them an electronic device is plugged in which makes a buzzing sound of varying pitch indicating whether the piece being checked is too thick, too thin, or precisely according to specification.

Finger and face guards for the blind need not be intricate. Sightless workers are taught exactly where every cutting edge is, and are careful of what they do with their hands. Siemens statistics show that the accident rate among the sightless in their plants is far below that of workers who can see.

There are, naturally, many things that the blind cannot do. They must work standing or sitting at one bench; movement in a busy factory is too hazardous for them. They should not handle heavy weights. Soldering, welding, and other processes which demand sight to direct a dangerous concentration of heat are also beyond their reach. But that still leaves a lot they can do. "The possibility of their usefulness depends on our investment—not in money but in ingenuity," said an enthusiastic young engineer. "The blind will do the rest."

The Siemens planners, with experience, have developed a basic rule. They never give a sightless worker something to do that he cannot accomplish with at least the competence of a sighted mechanic. Nothing is more destructive to his spirit than to feel he can't keep up. Careful tests are made by seasoned blind personnel who understand the problem and its importance on every new

process before others are permitted to undertake it.

About half of the blind workers at Siemens were trained craftsmen before they lost their sight during one of the two World Wars. The story of Otto is typical. He had been blinded in the war. After his discharge from the hospital he had been assigned to a government workshop for the sightless. "It was torture," he told me. "I learned to make brushes, to weave baskets—I, who was a carpenter. I knew I could do much more, but gradually my conviction disappeared. I knew that educated blind men had risen to big positions as executives or scientists but I was just an ordinary man with average energy and intelligence, and less than average education. With my brooms and baskets, I was dying a slow mental death. This was charity, not the real work I wanted."

By fortunate chance Otto heard that jobs for blind people were open at a Siemens factory nearby. He applied and was accepted. "When I first heard the hum of machinery and the many voices, I was frightened—and utterly pessimistic. I had passed the aptitude tests. The people who interviewed me had assured me that, if I worked hard, I would make the grade. But nothing that anybody could say would convince me that I stood a chance." After completing elementary training he was given an uncomplicated drilling process job to do. "The man next to me was sighted—a big, cheery fellow. Soon he began talking and joking with me, with none of the embarrassment that we dread so much from people who think we're different. And then something else happened. I had been working particularly hard one day to make a good record. '*Donnerwetter*,' said my neighbor suddenly. 'I wish I could do it that fast.' Then a voice which I recognized as our foreman's—an exacting man—joined in. 'Yes,' it said. 'He certainly earns his pay.' This was a great moment in my life; the conquering of my hopelessness had begun."

Without his knowing it I followed Otto out of the factory at the end of the workday. The blind leave 15 minutes earlier than the others to avoid the rush, and the Siemens people arrange for most of them to have housing close to the factory. Many prefer, however, to live at considerable distances and use seeing-eye dogs.

In some plants the dogs are allowed to lie all day on a mat at their master's feet. In this one the sightless workers had voted against the practice because other men fed the dogs snacks, which made them fat. Unerringly Otto walked to the kennel in the factory yard. A big Alsatian bounded out and nuzzled his master. Hand on the bridle, Otto started off—head erect, shoulders back, a good day behind him.

Besides a few concessions—such as different check-in and check-out times—the blind are treated by management and unions the same as the sighted. Wage scales and pensions are the same. "We tried once," a union official said, "to get shorter hours and various special privileges for them. But they were indignant. Our blind are extraordinary people."

Siemens began finding out about the qualities of the blind years ago. World War I produced a staggering number of sightless veterans. Industry had no use for them. But Carl Friedrich von Siemens, then head of the

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(Continued from page 12)

firm, took the family's traditional point of view: "A Siemens man belongs to us. We take care of him."

Direktor Paul Perls, in charge of the combine's electrical equipment works, came up with a radical plan. "Let's not give them charity," he pleaded. "Let's give them work, difficult work that will challenge and satisfy them."

Direktor Perls' plan had tough going for a while. Executive engineers and foremen raised objections. The products of the blind would be substandard, the Siemens reputation for quality would suffer and so would sales if buyers knew that sightless people were at work in the factories. Herr Perls gradually proved the opposite—to the satisfaction of not only the doubters at Siemens but also of other famous German firms noted for precision work such as Zeiss and Bosch.

By the time the blinded of World War II began to pour in—some 30,000 of them—Siemens knew exactly what to do with its quota. Moreover, by then Siemens engineers had devised ways for other firms to employ the sightless. The most important of these is the perfection of a device which permits the blind to serve as telephone operators.

*The Lion*



So What?

## SIEMENS' BLIND CRAFTSMEN

Engineer Friedrich Wilhelm Gust, one of Siemens' top telephone experts, was drafted in World War II for work on bomb and projectile firing mechanisms. One of his close friends was an eye specialist. "You scientists!" exclaimed the doctor one night after returning from a military hospital. "Why don't you put your minds to doing something for these people whose lives your damned machines have blasted?" Engineer Gust did just that.

For months he and other Siemens technicians worked on the problem of designing a switchboard which could be handled by a blind operator. Their brilliantly simple solution was a pencil-sized cylinder two inches long which is substituted for the usual flashing signal lamp. Using the same socket as the lamp, the cylinder clicks on receiving an electrical impulse and pokes out a pin from its tip. With this inexpensive device even a complicated switchboard can be converted in a few minutes for use by the blind, and changed back again for a sighted operator.

When a call reaches the blind operator's board a soft buzzer signals by its pitch whether the call is from outside or inside. Simultaneously, one of the indicators clicks and raises





Working evenings and Saturdays, members of Yonkers, N.Y., club turn carpenters to replace their former Lions Den (destroyed by fire) with an up-to-date recreation hall for Westchester children at camp in Ardsley. Building materials cost \$5,000.

way radio for the East Tiverton Rescue Squad Wagon.

ROCK HILL, S.C., sold nearly 200 dozen brooms in an annual sale that cleared about \$1,100. A booth at the county fair netted \$700 and a college football game brought in \$1,300.

RAPID CITY, S.D., sold 1,400 blind-made brooms in a house-to-house sales campaign with all proceeds going to assist the blind.

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn., held its 22nd turtle derby for the benefit of sight conservation in Hamilton county and netted \$3,450.

LEWISBURG, Tenn., reports the proceeds of a horse show amounted to approximately \$2,100.

ROGERSVILLE, Tenn., acquired three eye-testing machines for use in the schools of the entire county. It is the club's intention to test the eyes of every child of school age and provide glasses for needy cases.

KINGSPORT, Tenn., reports approximately \$3,000 profit from its annual turtle derby. Most of the money will be spent on the club's conservation program.

HITCHCOCK, Texas, put on a carnival that netted approximately \$1,900. The high school band was given \$200 toward uniforms. Six teams of Little League baseball players were sponsored and a young boy was sent to Crippled Children's Camp.

FORT WORTH, Texas, appropriated \$500 to rehabilitate a high school student who required extensive plastic and dental surgery to correct major deformities.

AMARILLO (SAN JACINTO), Texas, sold over \$800 worth of blind-made brooms. By cooperating with the Pleasant Valley Lions, the club earned \$175 on Games Night toward furnishing a duplex at the Crippled Children's Camp.

HOUSTON (DENVER-HARBOR), Texas, conducted coon dog field trials

under strict national rules for two days and gave a Saturday night dance for the benefit of crippled children. A profit of \$500 was earned from the undertaking.

WILSON, Texas, raised \$2,200 for tornado victims. Members cut weeds and cleaned the cemetery.

NEPHI, Utah, sold official programs at the Ute Stampede as an annual major money-raising project and netted over \$1,000.

MARYSVALE, Utah, sponsored a pioneer celebration to finance the final payment on street lights. The event was successful financially and as entertainment.

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Va., installed lights at the playground at an expense of \$2,800.

LAKE CITY, Wash., purchased and installed a furnace at the Lake City youth center. The cost to the club was \$327.

TACOMA, Wash., put on a city-wide scrap metal drive that netted \$1,011 for the Tacoma Boys Club Camp to build camp cabins on Lake Tanwax.

WENATCHEE, Wash., poured a concrete floor for the new \$75,000 Y.M.C.A. camp lodge. The cost, aside from the volunteer labor of Lion members, was about \$1,000.

WHEELING, W. Va., financed two eye operations, bought 190 pairs of spectacles and made 162 refractions.

DELVAN, Wis., operated a week of carnival entertainment at a profit of \$1,100.

MARINETTE, Wis., increased its major activities fund by \$800 earned by sponsoring a circus.

MEETEETSE, Wyo., selected the building of a city park as its first long-range project. The returns from a white elephant sale were earmarked for the park.

CHEYENNE, Wyo., presented \$2,000 to the city for improving the roads in Lions Park.

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its pin. The operator runs his fingers over the bank of cylinders, finds the one which is signaling, and manipulates the toggle switch directly behind it to make the desired connection. A good operator can find the right cylinder almost instantly.

I watched two operators side-by-side at a big board. One was blind, one sighted. Each was serving 10 trunk lines and 200 extensions. In place of the pad on which the sighted operator jotted down messages the sightless one had a Braille stenotyper. The blind man was as fast if not faster than his partner. His voice was brisk and cheerful. "It's a nice job," he said during a break. "I'm in touch with a lot of people. It makes me feel very much alive."

In the beginning Engineer Gust had the usual troubles. People were reluctant to experiment with their important communications systems. Gradually, however, with an unrelenting campaign of speeches and writings by Gust and his associates, resistance diminished.

The German Federal Post Office, which runs the country's telephone system, began to accept blind operators and some big private companies followed suit. Almost 2,000 blind are now employed as telephone operators in Germany and the practice is spreading to France, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Greece, Yugoslavia and Scandinavia. "I think Siemens can be a little proud," says Engineer Gust modestly.

Siemens' work for the blind is unique. Even in the United States, where the sightless have long been cared for—schooled and provided with special facilities by many organizations such as the Lighthouse and the American Foundation for the Blind, progress in industry is comparatively slow. True, some American concerns employ a number of sightless workers at relatively uncomplicated tasks. But no industry in our country or elsewhere has gone as far as Siemens in a field in which so much remains to be done for so many. Siemens has proved what *can* be done.

*Inquiries from American firms interested in the use of blind workers may be addressed to:*

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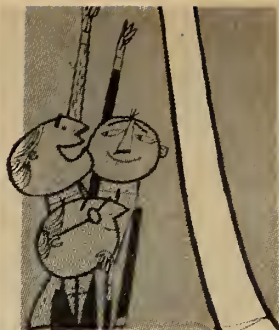
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## GOING! GOING! GONE!

(Continued from page

pointers to keep in mind, if you want to get what you're going for, and get it for the right price:

1. Know your merchandise. It's usually on exhibit in advance of the auction, so the public can examine it. If you see an item you want, and you're not sure what it's worth, check the prices of similar items in retail stores ahead of time.

2. If you're going in for antiques, and you're not familiar with antiques, study up on them first. You can get books on the subject at public libraries, and museum curators will be glad to discuss values with you.

3. Deal only with reputable auctioneers and auction galleries. You can check with banks or with auction devotees of your acquaintance.

4. Keep your head while you're bidding. Fix a price you're willing to pay and stick to it. Don't be swept off your feet by hot competition. Unless, of course, you're a millionaire and you don't care what you buy or how much you pay for it. In that

case, you don't have to pay attention to the first three pointers either.

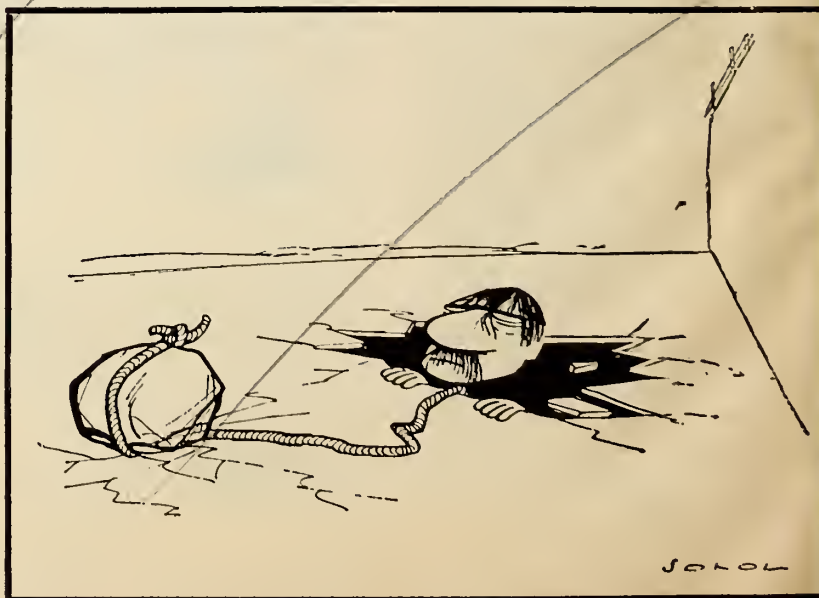
There's a classic story told of an auctioneer to illustrate what happens to the unwary bidder who allows himself to be carried away.

Seems this fellow dropped in on an auction gallery and became enamored of a talking parrot. When it was up for sale. He called out a bid. There came a higher bid from somewhere else in the room. The fellow topped it. The other bidder topped him. Up and up went the bidding. Finally the fellow managed to buy the bird—for \$300.

But when he got home with the \$300 parrot, it wouldn't talk. The fellow pleaded, coaxed, restrained. The parrot was tight-beaked.

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